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LYRA NIGERIÆ



LYRA NIGERIÆ

BY

ADAMU

(E. C. ADAMS)



LONDON

T. FISHER UNWIN

ADELPHI TERRACE

1911

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DEDICATION

*To all old friends, alive or dead,
Who by my side, through freak of fate,
Have borne the burden and the heat,
This little book I dedicate.*

GLOSSARY

<i>Allah ! Akbar !</i>	.	God is great.
<i>Bature</i>	.	A white man.
<i>Chop</i>	.	Food of any sort.
<i>Craw craw</i>	.	A skin disease.
<i>Dan Sanda</i>	.	<i>Lit.</i> a man with a stick, <i>i.e.</i> a policeman.
<i>Doki</i>	.	A horse.
<i>D.S.P.</i>	.	District Superintendent of Police.
<i>Dug-out</i>	.	A native canoe.
<i>Guinea Worm</i>	.	A common disease.
<i>Harmattan</i>	.	Cold wind, blows November to March.
<i>Ju-ju man</i>	.	A Fetish priest.
<i>Likitor</i>	.	Native pronunciation of "doctor."
<i>Mai-Doki</i>	.	A groom.
<i>Mallam</i>	.	A Mohammedan preacher.
<i>Piccin</i>	.	A baby.
<i>P.W.D.</i>	.	Public Works Director.
<i>Sanu</i>	.	The Hausa greeting.
<i>Savvy</i>	.	<i>v.</i> To know ; <i>adj.</i> cunning, clever.
<i>Shawck</i>	.	Local name for vulture.
<i>Trek</i>	.	March.
<i>Zakka</i>	.	The Corn Tax.



PREFACE

'Tis hard to give in tabloid form
The record of our daily round,
The trivial happenings, grave and gay,
In which such lives as mine abound.

These are not tales of London life,
With little variance year by year ;
I tell of men that well might be
The dwellers on another sphere.

Blame me not if my changing mood
Should over-varying seem to be,
The woof of farce together bound
By warp of grimmest tragedy.

For thus the Fates our webs have wove,
A close-drawn mesh of laugh, of tear,
Of joy, of grief, of life, of death—
It is the way things happen here.

Hold me excused, I also pray,
If sometimes I am rude in speech,
For words to facts relation bear
In due proportion each to each.

PREFACE

How shall I tell, with polished tongue,
Of lands uncivilised and wild ?
As aptly might Johnsonian phrase
Be uttered by some savage child.

Ye master craftsmen, stint your blame,
Nor treat me with too much contempt ;
Apprentices their craft must learn,
And this one is my first attempt.

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LYRA NIGERIÆ

THE LEPER

*Here through the live-long day I wait,
Allah ! Allah !*

*In the shadows flung by the City gate,
Allah ! Allah !*

*My fingers have gone, and my toes as well,
And the leprous spots on my body swell,
But Allah Eternal does all things well.*

Allah ! Allah ! Akbar !

TIME was when I was the best of all,
Proud in my strength, I was stout and tall;
I could wrestle a fall with the strongest man,
And swift as the beasts of the bush I ran.
When at work in the fields with the panting crowd,
I would ply my hoe and would laugh aloud,
For the swinging toil, which 'twas plain to see
Made them sweat and ache, it was naught to me.
I feared no man, for I had no need,
It was they who should tremble at me indeed !
No armed man, be it peace or war,
No cunning, smooth-tongued man of the law,

LYRA NIGERIÆ

Even Allah on high on His rainbow throne,
Seemed naught in the strength that I thought my
own.

Now through the live-long day I wait,

Allah! Allah!

In the shadows flung by the City gate,

Allah! Allah!

My fingers have gone, and my toes as well,

And the leprous spots on my body swell,

But Allah Eternal does all things well.

Allah! Allah! Akbar!

I loved a girl, and her father swore

We should mate when the harvesting time was o'er;

But we reaped the crops and the year began,

And we waited on through the harmattan;

And then by the Holy Word I swore

I had waited enough, I would wait no more.

But he turned from the bargain that we'd agreed,

He told me that Allah had so decreed

That I and his daughter should never mate,

And the true believers must bow to Fate.

But I laughed to myself, as I turned and went,

For well I knew what that answer meant.

He was an old man, helpless, blind,

And she was his all of the human kind,

THE LEPER

And he dreaded the fate that to such may fall—
He feared to lose her, and that was all.
So I carried her off from her home that night,
On a stolen horse, when the moon was bright :
Through the silent streets, through the gates we passed,
Through the sleeping farms to the bush at last ;
Down the deep dips where the arums grew,
Over the open aglint with dew ;
Up the rock-bound hills, 'neath the glittering sky,
Through the timbered dales where the shadows lie ;
Till at last we came, with the morning grey,
To a little bush village long miles away.
And the fire of life through our bodies ran,
'Twas little we recked of that blind old man ;
'Twas little we thought of his dire distress
Left all alone in his helplessness.
But that is a story that's often told—
That the young can be cruel far past the old.

*Now through the live-long day I wait,
Allah ! Allah !*

*In the shadows flung by the City gate,
Allah ! Allah !*

*My fingers have gone, and my toes as well,
And the leprous spots on my body swell,
But Allah Eternal does all things well.
Allah ! Allah ! Akbar !*

LYRA NIGERIÆ

Well, there we dwelt with the village folk,
And never a word of our tale we spoke;
But the woman fell sick, sinking day by day,
Though what was ailing her none could say;
Till one night, when the sowing had just begun,
I entered our hut when the day was done.
There by the side of the fire she lay,
And the cloth from her body had slipped away;
Then a flame leapt up with a sudden flare,
And I turned and looked at her lying there,
And I reeled as though from a sudden blow,
For now I knew all there was to know.
And out from that hut in the dark I crept,
I veiled my face and I lay and wept.
Now I knew what the old man meant indeed,
When he told me that Allah had so decreed
That I and his daughter should never mate,
And the true believers must bow to Fate.
His very words I had ne'er forgot,
For she was a leper, and knew it not.
What is the tale that the Mallams tell?
Once upon earth and then Heaven or Hell!
Man but once is born and but once shall die!
How do they know it? They lie! They lie!
For I died that night when the truth I knew,
When I curs'd my strength and my cunning too.

THE LEPER

I died that night, and I died each day,
As little by little she fell away,
Through the long-drawn months of the dying year,
Till I buried all that was left of her.
And I learnt beside her the lesson stern
That sooner or later all men shall learn ;
The truth that our Holy Prophet taught,
That wisdom is wind, that strength is naught ;
That the hand of Fate is above, around,
And in Allah alone can be safety found.
Allah ! Allah ! Akbar !

*So now through the live-long day I wait,
Allah ! Allah !
In the shadows flung by the City gate,
Allah ! Allah !
My fingers have gone, and my toes as well,
And the leprous spots on my body swell,
But Allah Eternal does all things well,
So I hope for Heaven : I have been in Hell.
Allah ! Allah ! Akbar !*

A MAN WITH A FUTURE BEHIND HIM

IN all men's affairs there's a turn of the tide
Which taken at flood makes him master ;
If he misses it, sooner or later he'll land
In the quicksands and shoals of disaster.
So Shakespeare remarks, and I think that he's right,
And you youngsters would do well to mind him,
Or you'll find yourself stranded before you are old
As a man with his future behind him.

He's a man that you'll meet go wherever you will
I will bet it without hesitation ;
He belongs to a class scattered over the world,
Right from here to the end of creation.
Wherever there's danger, discomfort and work,
In the thick of it all you will find him,
For he drifts there like other wrecks drift to the
shore,
That's the man with his future behind him.

Why he doesn't get on it's not easy to say,
For he's competent, straight and hard-working ;

A MAN WITH A FUTURE BEHIND HIM

He can't curry favour, he's not full of gas,
But he does his job well and no shirking.
Any beastly unthankful, impossible task,
As a matter of course is assigned him ;
Other folks get the credit, but he does the work,
Does the man with his future behind him.

Nor the fear of being held the responsible man,
It's not that that his prospects has blighted ;
No, it's quite the reverse, if he had his deserts
He would either be hung or be knighted.
Yet still when they're dashing out medals and stars,
The merest of thanks are declined him,
And worse men keep on climbing over the head
Of the man with his future behind him.

Till at last when the bugles ring out from the hill,
And the flags are half-mast in the station,
And " Poor chap, he's a loss, well we've all got to go,"
Is the gist of his funeral oration,
Then justice is done for all alike there,
'Neath the cross where his friends have consigned
him,
Just another chap come to the end of his tour,
One more man with his future behind him.

JUGGERNAUT

IN the days of old when the Hindoo God
Was drawn through the shouting throng,
Men threw themselves 'neath the chariot wheels
In the track that he passed along;
For the God of their faith was their God indeed,
God of their bone and blood,
And the way of his going was thus made straight,
And the way of his passing good.

The Goddess Britannia rides to-day,
All over the world she goes,
From the burning lands where the Scorpion shines,
To where the Aurora glows;
And her devotees 'neath her chariot wheels
Are laying them down to die,
And wherever the flag of Britannia waves
The bones of her children lie.

She has taken her tithe of our sires of old
Who have perished on sea or land,
You can see the mark of her chariot wheels
Where the rough-made crosses stand.

JUGGERNAUT

And ever and ever their sons in turn
Are dying by field and flood,
For the ruby crown that Britannia wears
Is jewelled with British blood.

So give them a passing thought sometimes,
Those men of the earlier day ;
The men who have founded the track we tread,
The men who have "paved the way" ;
Who have died at last on a fevered bed,
Or in red-hot fight been killed,—
Just a thought for the workers of yesterday,
The men on whose bones we build.

THE WISDOM OF SULIMANU

As I sit in the mosque-thrown shadow, listen and
mark my words,

You white-faced Unbelievers, our new-found masters
and lords.

He who's unjust to a native is unjust to the white
man too,

For there really is no saying what mischief that man
may do.

The quarrelsome man's a danger to himself and to
all the lot;

He who jumps into hot water may find it some day
too hot.

He who is always boasting has often small cause to
boast;

Think you is it the blowing horse that is first at the
winning post?

He who is always grumbling is a fool, and he tells
it too;

Why should you stick to a billet which is not good
enough for you?

THE WISDOM OF SULIMANU

He who raves and screams at his servants breeds
chaos and not reform;

Do you work best in the quiet or the midst of a
thunder-storm?

If you have a vice, conceal it, hide it from light of
day;

Do you deem it well that your servants should think
you are worse than they?

If you gaze on a native woman, beware! oh, my lord,
beware!

You boil and filter your water, it is wisdom to take
good care.

If you make a mistake, allow it; don't hide it 'neath
layers of lies,

For it is in the secret muck-heaps that are bred the
most poisonous flies.

Lay not your fault on another if your doings should
go amiss;

The load you are paid to carry is *your* burden, it
isn't his.

If men lie about you, well, let them, let them lie
their souls into hell;

But if they speak the truth against you, be careful
and heed it well.

A PASSIVE RESISTER

WHEN a native king starts palavering,
And won't do his kindergarten,
Then soon or late things will reach a state
That any man might dishearten.
Of course it's all right if he means to fight,
You can easily bust his bubble ;
But if he sits tight, then it's hell's delight,
He can give a whole world of trouble.

.
The King of Birin-Wawa was a monarch of that sort,
Although he didn't look it in the least,
But in point of sheer evasion he ran nearly neck for
neck

With the simple-minded statesmen of the East.
He wouldn't pay his taxes, though they dunned him
all the time ;
Though personified politeness it is true ;
Yet the blessing of the Prophet on yourself and
family
Does not greatly help to swell the Revenue.
At last they wrote and pointed out that for three
years and more,

A PASSIVE RESISTER

Not even had his Zakka tax been paid ;
One year he had to send at least, or someone would be sent
To fetch it, if the call was not obeyed.

A few days later in there came a string of laden men,
Each bore a heavy burden on his head ;
Exactly what the contents were 'twas difficult to say,
Though certainly it smelt like something dead.
On close inspection it appeared that they were native
bags,

Choke full of mildew, dirt, and yellow mould,
And in a letter he set forth this was his Zakka tax,
The first instalment just on four years old.
That was, of course, beyond a joke, so two of us were sent
To explain to him such conduct was not right ;
And he never sent to meet us, or took any heed at all,
But just let us wander in as best we might.

Then we were put into a hut, a dirty little sty,
Not fit for dogs to die in, and next-door
Was a fine big compound empty, as well made as
could be wished,

Which contained a dozen well-built huts or more.
Of course we took possession, and hot anger filled
our hearts,

And next day we had his Highness "on the mat."
First, he hadn't come to meet us, would he kindly
now explain

LYRA NIGERIÆ

His reason for behaviour such as that ?

And he said he'd gone the other road, he didn't think
that we

Would have chose the road by which we came last night ;
Because it was the worst in all the land for guinea-worm,
He should pray we wouldn't get it, but we might.

That point was dropped. Now secondly, the matter
of the house,

What did he mean by acting in that style ?

Putting two white men in a hut not fit to house a pig,
While a decent house stood empty all the while ?

And he said, of course, that all the town and all in it
was ours,

It was we who chose the house where we had slept ;
He hadn't put us into it, the reason was because
'Twas the house where small-pox sufferers were kept.
It seemed no use to argue, so we told him he must pay
His tax again, and pay it properly ;

And he answered that of course he would, as often
as we liked,

And his cheerful smile was quite a sight to see.

He gave us each a pony as a token of regard,
(Perhaps it wasn't they who brought the tsetse-fly,
But they both died shortly afterwards, and what was
even worse,

Our own poor dokis started off to die).

A PASSIVE RESISTER

He furthermore presented us with half a dozen bulls
With a prayer that Allah would increase our kine.
So I suppose it *wasn't* they that brought the sickness
into camp

That played old Harry with the Transport line !
The blessing of the Prophet may perhaps have gone
astray,

Man isn't granted everything he seeks ;
But I know the whole performance was unfavourably
received,

And the "powers that be" wrote most unkind critiques.
Perhaps he thought those presents were a sort of
dividend,

An interest that he paid upon the debt,
For that tax seemed slow in coming, though he wrote
most affably,

In fact I don't know that he's paid it yet.

.
When a native king starts palavering,
And won't do his kindergarten,
Then soon or late things will reach a state
That any man might dishearten.
Of course it's all right if he means to fight,
You can easily bust his bubble ;
But if he sits tight, then it's hell's delight,
He can give a whole world of trouble.

SERGEANT SO-AND-SO GOES HOME

WELL, chaps, here I am, done a year and a bit,
And you said I'd peg out in a quarter ;
Get ate by some nigger or lion or snake,
Or go out with a go of Blackwater.

What's it like ? Well, it isn't like nothing on earth,
Nothing like it, and I don't deceive you.
Will I have a drink ? Will a blooming duck swim ?
Will I ? My holy oath I believe you !

It's a cock-eyed, back-ended, fair muddled-up show,
In a real topsy-turvy condition,
And you won't find another land like it on earth,
If you look from Peru to Perdition.

There you have to go short of the things you most
need,
'Cos the Government ain't got no money ;
But if you saw the things what the Government
buy,
It 'ud fair make you laugh, it's too funny.

SERGEANT SO-AND-SO GOES HOME

There the land don't grow nothing of any account,
Not for food nor for clothing nor liquor;
Yet it's one of our proudest possessions on earth,
What we're there for at all is a nicker!

And those wonderful cities and palaces too!
It's a lie, it's a big kiddy fable;
There isn't a house in the whole of the land
What's fit for a dead donkey's stable.

There the least bit of brass is a threepenny bit,
And they'll charge you ten quid if you're willing,
Though the whole of the stuff in the market, most
times,
Don't add up to the worth of a shilling.

There a sheep ain't a sheep, it's a sort of a goat.
Oh! it's true, and I *ain't* talking silly;
You know it's a sheep, 'cos its tail's hanging down,
Not cocked up in the air like old Billy.

There even the girls have their breasts upside down,
When they're young and there's no "gay deceiver";
And the old 'uns they wear them just flopping down
flat,
Like the ears of a blooming retriever.

LYRA NIGERIÆ

There, there's birds that can't fly, and there's foxes
that do,

And there's fish that comes out and goes
walking—

(*Furiously.*) All right then, well, call me a liar at
once,

Gawd! what *is* the use of me talking!

“ARMA VIRUMQUE CANO”

ARMS and the men I sing,
Who marched in the land of the Niger,
Armed with the thunders and lightnings of Heaven,
Like Prophet Elijah :
A thunderbolt flung of the Gods,
That a man may not know till it whacks him,
Or what comes to something the same,
For the natives don't savvy the Maxim.

Sing how they mustered and armed,
How they quitted their home at head-quarters ;
Sing of wars, rumours of wars,
Alarums, excursions, and slaughters.
Sing how they came to the town,
Duty-steeled against mercy or pity,
Turning their death-dealing guns
On the walls and the gates of the city.

Now men without arms I sing,
Who came from the North in the morning,
Entered the enemy's town
And sat down there without any warning.

LYRA NIGERIÆ

Their share in this famous affair
Is one of which nobody need buck,
For it wasn't for glory they came,
But to shoot the indigenous reed-buck.

Sing how they entered the town,
How they purchased their eggs and their chickens,
Chucked the girls under the chin,
And laughed at the quaint little "piccins."
Sing of the "wine of the Scots,"
Giving comfort to throats that are choking;
Sing how they bathed and had "chop,"
And then sat there just placidly smoking.

Arms and the men I sing,
And the tramp of the marching battalions,
The roll of the on-coming guns,
And the neigh of the war-sniffing stallions.
Hearts beating high in each breast,
Souls filled with doing or dying;
Tremble, ye children of men,
For the flag of Britannia is flying ! !

"Half a League ! Half a League on,"—
"Rule Britannia and Britons shall never,"—
"England expects every man,"—
And "Up Guards and at 'em" for ever.

“ARMA VIRUMQUE CANO”

Ready to conquer or fall,
And fit to take nonsense from no king,
Till they found in the midst of the town
Two white men just placidly smoking.

Sing of what after occurred,
Sing of the calm explanations ;
Grand was the victory won,
And bloodless—a lesson to nations.
Sing how they marched away home
Full of pride, and what Briton can doubt it ?
Sing of what other folks said ?
No ! I'd better sing no more about it.

“IN ARTICULO MORTIS”

A LITTLE, thatched, mud-built hovel,
And a battered lamp burning low ;
Outside the hot still midnight,
With a myriad stars aglow.
To the eastward a heavy cloud-bank
As black as a streak of ink,
Lit up with the quivering glimmer
Of the distant lightning-blink.
On a camp bed a white man dying,
Just gasping his soul away,
With another man sitting by him,
Who tended him as he lay.
Slowly the glazed eyes open,
While, “ Billy,” he murmured low,
“ I didn’t know you were with me,
Thought you’d gone long ago.”
The other man rose and touched him,
“ Poor devil, he’s off his head !
I ain’t Billy, my dear old fellow,
I’m Travers, you know,” he said.
The dying man lay there silent,

"IN ARTICULO MORTIS"

Wet through with the sweat of death,
And it seemed that his soul was going
As he fought for each hard-drawn breath.
But at last he murmured, "Billy,
I reckon I'm near the end ;
But before I peg out, old fellow,
There's a message I want to send.
You know that chap called Travers,
He's the biggest d—— fool you'll meet ;
But though he's a rank outsider,
His wife is a perfect treat.
I met her at home last summer ;
My God ; what a time we had !
If Travers found out about it
It would drive the poor idiot mad.
For we fairly played hell together,
And I used to laugh in my sleeve,
To think of his sweating his soul out here
And me running his wife 'on leave.'
She lives down in Chelsea Gardens ;
Just write to her, Bill, and say
That I'm finished, and dead, and done for,
And—don't give the game away."

"Twas over—the last word spoken !

Travers covered the dead man's face,

LYRA NIGERLÆ

Stunned with his own dishonour,
Stunned with a life's disgrace.
And he crept from the dead man's presence
Out into the midnight warm,
The glow of the distant lightning,
And the sound of the muttering storm.
"She loved him! My God! she loved him!
Well, I envy him that in Hell!
But, God have pity upon me,
For I envy him death as well!"

HOME, SWEET HOME

(SONG)

I HAVE a home, a dear old home,
I think of it where'er I roam ;
At night in dreams I often go
To that dear home I long for so.
It is a home so sweet and rank,
With bungalows of rotting plank,
The dear mosquitoes buzz around,
The scented vapours swell the ground.

Chorus—

At my home at Zunguru,
My home at Zunguru ;
Where the little mosquitoes they nip, nip, nip,
And the dear little sandflies they grip, grip, grip.
It's pleasant to sit at your window
Watching the shawks float by ;
It's a beautiful place to live in,
And a terrible place to die.

Oh, home, sweet home, 'tis joy to feel
The prickly-heat from head to heel,

LYRA NIGERIÆ

To dash the sweat from out your eyes,
And watch the sweet miasma rise.
The lovely water, rich and brown,
The sweet scents from the native town,
The gentle sandflies on one's feet,
The dirt, the dust, the stinks, the heat.

Chorus—

At my home at Zunguru,
My home at Zunguru ;
Where the little mosquitoes they nip, nip, nip,
And the dear little sandflies they grip, grip, grip.
It's pleasant to sit at your window,
Watching the shawks float by ;
It's a beautiful place to live in,
And a terrible place to die.

“VALE”

(SONG)

IN the Mersey drizzle a West Coast boat
Is waiting a favouring tide,
Each passenger there has the blooming hump
That a camel would own with pride.
You take a last drink with the friends you leave,
As the vessel gets under way ;
One last farewell, one grip of the hand,
And, fairly fed up, you say :—

“ Give my regards to all we know,
To Bobby and Joseph, and Solano ;
Round the haunts where the Coasters go,
The Tivoli in the Strand ;
Down below at the Empire bar,
Up in the Lounge where the angels are,
Round at the ‘ Sports,’ give my last Ta-ta,
And tip them a friendly hand.”

IN the heat of Forcados, a home-bound ship,
Is waiting to England to go,

LYRA NIGERIÆ

And the cheery survivors who've managed to live,
Are drinking iced Lager. What ho!
You take a last look at the mangrove swamps,
One final sniff at the smell,
To the roll and the heave of the good old sea,
You murmur this last farewell :—

“Give my regards to Zunguru,
Farewell to Lokoja and Burutu,
Land of mosquitoes, and stinks, adieu!
Dirt, heat, and sand!
Fevers, clammy and cold and hot,
Memos, Minutes, Returns, and rot,
Saying ‘Good-bye’ to the whole damn lot,
Isn't it perfectly grand?”

NORTHWARD HO!

(SONG)

NORTHWARD ho! to the open plains,
North to the land where the breezes blow ;
From the close-grown Bush with its foetid reek,
To the land where the prickly acacias grow.

The land of the camel and ostrich too,
Where the lions lurk and the reed-bucks run ;
Hill and valley, and wide-spread plain,
Open all to the blazing sun.

North from the reek of the deadly Coast,
The steaming soil and the insects' stings ;
Ho! for the icy-cold harmattan,
Though the desert dust in its wake it brings.

Southern Nigeria, nay, oh nay !
Some men seem willing to stew and seethe,
But into the saddle and we will ride
North to the land where a man can breathe.

THE OLD M. I.

I SAW a man sitting beside the road,
And by him a horse lay dead.

“What’s the matter? The show bust up?” said I,
But he laughed and he shook his head.

“No, I shot the old doki to save its life,
I reckon he’d tsetse-fly;
And now that old cripple has gone to roost,
I’m the last of the old M. I.

“Time was when we were a decent corps,
And we reckoned we’d come to stay;
But a man doesn’t savvy his luck out here,
He don’t know it from day to day.
We thought some day when the fun began,
We’d be useful—at least we’d try;
And for that we sweated, for that we worked,
When we served with the old M. I.

“We’d games besides, we’d a polo team,
And we’d even a racing cup;
And just as we really were going strong,
The whole blooming show bust up.

THE OLD M. I.

Of course they still talk about 'mobile troops,'
But I reckon our day's gone by;
It's a question of going, going, gone!
That's the fate of the old M. I.

"But in Zaria days it was in full bloom,
On Saturdays, after mess,
Singing 'Looping the Loop,' and 'Round and
Round,'
And 'He bought me a Wedding Dress.'
With gramophones grinding out different tunes,
Bismillah! the fun ran high!
Well, I passed that mess, the roof's caved in
That once covered the old M. I.

"The polo ground is a hay-field now,
Where the pie-dogs unhunted bark;
And there isn't a sign of the barracks left,
Excepting a dirty mark.
The hills around it are still the same,
The river still trickles by,
But except for that it's a different place
Since the days of the old M. I.

"Then we had a race meeting every week,
Ye gods! how those apes would go!

LYRA NIGERIÆ

Lemon cutting, and tugs of war,
And 'Stand by for the Beauty Show.'
And every man, be he black or white,
His levellest best would try ;
For men worked hard, and they played hard too,
When they served with the old M. I.

" Well, I must be going, let's have a drink,—
It's the first to-day of course ;—
I was only just sitting down here to rest
While they saddled another horse.
So here's good luck and the best of times,
And one to the days gone by.
Now let's have another ; we'll drink the last
To the health of the old M. I."

A DEAD LETTER

SEE, here it lies in my letter-case,
The crumpled, meaningless, hopeless scrawl ;
No word of its message a man may read
In any language that's known at all.
In the hopes of fulfilling a dead man's wish,
In vain I endeavoured these lines to trace,
But dirty, tattered, and dim with age,
It still lies here in my letter-case.
One day up the creek where I lived alone,
Two natives came in a small canoe,
And the story they told me was passing strange,
Though no one could doubt that their tale was
true.
A strange white man, so the story ran,
Had wandered into their town alone,
And lay there dying, though who he was
And where he came from were quite unknown.
Now away to the south and the west as well,
There were white men living, as well I knew,
But away to the east there were none at all,
For the land was swamp and the people few.

LYRA NIGERIÆ

But I bundled together a few odd things,
And we journeyed on through the livelong
day.

Smoothly and silently on we slid
Down the long drawn bends of the water-way.
Where the mighty forest that girt us in
Lay in solemn silence no murmur broke
But the sound of our ripple amid the reeds,
And the gurgling splash of the paddles' stroke ;
Where never a sound of its myriad life,
Through the hot still hours of the day were
seen,

Save the bright kingfishers that smoothly slid
Like living jewels against the green.
Where the towering trees and the leaning grass,
Mirrored leaf for leaf in that flawless tide,
Seemed to quiver and break, as a rising fish
Made a broadening ring spreading far and
wide.

Hour after hour through that solemn hush,
Till at evening, just as the sun went down,
Against the bush on the water's edge
Rose the brown, thatched roofs of a native
town.

And there in a hut, lying all alone,
Was the man that I sought, but too late was I,

A DEAD LETTER

For Death already was there I knew ;

I had found him, but only to see him die.

My brandy flask to his lips I held,

And he opened his eyes for one moment just
His ice-cold fingers to mine were pressed

As this paper into my hand he thrust.

And then in a voice that could scarce be heard,

“ For God’s sake send it,” he feebly said,

And I answered not, but I closed his eyes

And folded his hands, for the man was dead.

Who was he ? Whence had he come ? Alack !

I never knew, I shall never know ;

For the hand of Death had his record closed,

To open no more till the Trump shall blow.

Some wanderer lost in the bush by chance ?

Some evil-doer compelled to fly ?

Some deserting sailor ? Some mission man ?

God knows from whence he had come to die.

His empty pockets revealed no clue,

Nothing to tell me of place or name

In the pitiful remnants of tattered rags

That clothed his shrunken and wasted frame.

And this wild scrawl, oh, alas ! to think

That his dying wish must be all in vain ;

This last poor work of the quivering hand,

The fevered eye and the death-numbed brain.

LYRA NIGERIÆ

His last dying wishes perhaps it bears
To some friend still waiting across the sea ;
Some secret learnt at the price of life,—
Or even his Will, and that well might be.
A confession, perhaps, to set right some wrong,
To a waiting wife bearing words of love,
To a friend, a mother, perhaps a child,
A living link with his God above.
So in hopes of fulfilling that dead man's wish,
In vain I endeavoured these words to trace,
But tattered, dirty, and dim with age,
It still lies here in my letter-case.

THE DECORATION OF THE BATH

It happened thus; One certain day
A bath on Sam's verandah lay;
A camp bath, battered, old and worn,
Most of its lining paint had gone,
And here and there the tin showed through,
Though otherwise as good as new.
Then Jones came in, it caught his eye
And angered him, I don't know why;
Till, glancing into Sammy's store,
A pot of "Aspinall" he saw.
Jones was like several men I've known,
He never could let things alone.
So straight he started, then and there,
The lacking paint-work to repair;
Till, tiring of his childish play,
He gave it up and walked away.
Now evening comes, the call to dress,
Sam hurries to prepare for mess.
His boys his bath as usual bring
(Boys never notice anything);
Now I must pause a moment here
And make confession too, I fear.

LYRA NIGERIÆ

A certain drink that people know
As cocktail had been on the flow,
And poor old Sammy, to his shame,
Was much addicted to that same ;
In fact I blush to own, to-night
Poor Sammy is a trifle " tight."
He hastens in the bath to get,
Not knowing that the paint is wet.
Now these camp baths of painted tin
Were never meant for swimming in,
In fact you've got to squash up small
To ever get in one at all.
By various acrobatic tricks
Sam squats him down, and there HE STICKS !
Held firmly by the feet and thighs,
He struggles all in vain to rise ;
Useless his efforts fierce and long,
He murmurs, " What the deuce is wrong ?"
One final, ineffectual try,
A worried look comes in his eye.
For suddenly, oh, awful thought !
He finds the reason he has sought.
With trembling limbs and starting eyes,
" Run for the doctor, man !" he cries.
The doctor hurries in apace
Expecting no unusual case.

THE DECORATION OF THE BATH

Then stands there, viewing in amaze
The spectacle that meets his gaze,
And softly murmurs, "No mistake,
These living pictures take the cake."
Poor Sammy, clad in birthday dress,
Sits sobbing there in dire distress.
His chin pressed close upon his knees,
A pitiful Diogenes,
With teardrops coursing down his cheeks,
As in a broken voice he speaks :
"Old chap, you've come too late for me,
It came on, oh, so suddenly.
I know you've warned me once or twice,
I wish I'd taken your advice.
Now it's too late to shun the cup,
I'm paralysed, I can't get up."
Now one thing I won't tell about,
That's how they got poor Sammy out.
This reticence is just as well,
The details are too sad to tell ;
But when at last they set him free,
He really was a sight to see.
In point of fact, that bath within
Was simply now unpainted tin.
And Sammy's niggers all next day
Were "cleaning paint work," so they say.

LYRA NIGERIÆ

In fact, poor chap, for full a week
He wasn't happy, so to speak ;
He seemed uneasy in his mind,
And smelt as newly turpented.
But out of evil cometh good,
A principle well understood,
He shed the failings of before,
He drinks one cocktail and no more
If any more are pressed on him
He shakes his head in manner grim,
And then recites this Spell, or Charm,
Designed to keep a man from harm.
It seems effectual though it's quaint,
"Try Aspinall's enamel paint."

PARADISE LOST

IF I should tell this tale aright,
In Eden I'd begin it,
For Father Adam and his wife,
Old Mother Eve, are in it.

You recollect all living things
Were peaceful and kind-hearted,
Till Mother Eve came on the scene,
And then the trouble started.

And since that day, it seems the curse
Is still her daughters blighting,
For women always start the rows
That set the men a-fighting.

Although West Africa is not
An earthly Eden truly,
Good fellowship will flourish there
If never strained unduly.

When men together have to live,
They study one another,
And words or deeds that tend to hurt
They do their best to smother.

LYRA NIGERIÆ

Thus A. has habits B. dislikes,
C. wishes D. in blazes,
And yet they know that every man
Has his peculiar crazes.

And so they worry on somehow,
Each other's "ways" forgiving,
They also do not criticise
Each other's mode of living.

Now such a group of men I knew,
In a Bush station dwelling ;
How great their friendship might have grown
There really is no telling.

Until, alas ! another man
Came up and joined the station,
And brought his newly-wedded wife,
And that spelt ruination.

She took a special interest
In other people's morals,
And to improve their mode of life
Created endless quarrels.

PARADISE LOST

She said that A. drank far too much,
It was disgusting really ;
B.'s treatment of the natives too,
Was criminal, or nearly.

She said C.'s language would disgrace
A Liverpool long-shoreman,
And D.'s establishment would be
Excessive for a Mormon.

These facts seemed greatly on her mind,
And caused her much emotion,
Though what it had to do with her,
I really have no notion.

But the result I know was this,
No more their thoughts disguising,
Each other's faults they recognised
And took to criticising.

No more they met with friendly word,
Nor rode nor shot together,
Each thought the other ones had reached
The limit of their tether.

LYRA NIGERIÆ

Black looks and angry hearts were theirs,
And hot recrimination,
Until their Eden soon became
The Devil of a station.

At last "Headquarters" intervened,
And to prevent a rumpus,
Scattered them up and down the land,
To all points of the compass.

Of course they all of them were "chalked"
Birds of a self-same feather,
Lacking in that *esprit de corps*
Which makes men work together.

Nay, more, those men who were such friends
Before this trouble started,
Never in friendship spoke again,
And in hot anger parted.

Their friendship gone, their enmity
No more they try to smother,
And even in the "Sports" at home
Won't recognise each other.

PARADISE LOST

Now, ladies, ladies, don't get cross,
But now my tale is ended,
Just answer me two questions please,
And pray don't be offended.

That many things are wrong, I know,
But though I don't defend them,
Who put it in your pretty heads
That it's *your* job to mend them?

Surely you've business of your own
To occupy your labours,
Without your worrying about
The morals of your neighbours.

Secondly, if when on the Coast
You don't like people's way there,
You are so charming when at home,
Good gracious! why not stay there?

A TALE OF WOE

JIMMY had a native sheep
With hair instead of wool,
And on the sly, on Jimmy's corn
It ate its tummy full.

That night it wandered round the house
While Jimmy tried to sleep,
And said "Baa! baa!"—a noise enough
To make the angels weep.

So Jimmy sent to "drive him go,"
But still he lingered near,
And said "Baa! baa!"—What Jimmy said
Was quite unfit to hear.

"What makes him make that blooming noise?"
In wrath poor Jimmy cried.
"I think he no be fit to sleep,"
His "savvy" boy replied.

"Then get my gun and cartridges,"
Said Jimmy, and he laughed;
"If it's insomnia he's got,
We'll try a sleeping draught."

A TALE OF WOE

So out into the night he went,
To put a stop to it,
But stumbling in the dark he fell
Slap down a water-pit.

He lost his gun, and wallowed deep
In water black as tar,
While from above his friend the sheep
Looked down and said "Baa! baa!"

They took Jim out and emptied him,
And then and there he swore
He'd kill and eat that "blooming sheep"
At once, if not before.

Next day his enemy appeared,
Roasted and boiled and hashed,
And Jimmy ate his fill of him
Although his teeth it smashed.

But oh, alas! my tale of woe
May never end that way,
That night he had a fearsome pain
As in his bed he lay.

LYRA NIGERIÆ

His little Mary ached and swelled,
 With pain his vitals rack,
His still unconquered enemy
 Was getting his own back.

In vain with pills and calomel
 And salts they did their best,
That sheep that would not let him sleep
 Sent him at last to rest.

The lambkins frisk on Jimmy's grave,
 Their sound is heard afar,
I passed beside it yesterday,
 And heard them say "Baa! baa!"

MAILS

MAILS! Mails! His Majesty's mails!
Local letters and Home as well;
News of gladness and news of grief.
Oh! those lucky bags, who can tell
The joy or sadness that each entails.
Mails! Mails! His Majesty's mails!

Mails! Mails! His Majesty's mails!
Late they are at the starting place;
Hungry outcasts left all forlorn
Pace the platform in sorry case,
Gas-blown wind-bags as slow as snails
Are the Mails! His Majesty's mails!

Mails! Mails! His Majesty's mails!
Days behind ere they reach their goal;
Men, news-hungry and all forlorn,
Curse their slowness with heart and soul,
Curse, till even *their* language fails,
The men who carry His Majesty's mails.

LYRA NIGERIÆ

Mails! Mails! His Majesty's mails!
Whatever happens there's no redress;
"Spoiled in transit," or "gone astray,"
Or "sent by mistake to the wrong address."
Who can blame the poor man who rails
At the Mails! His Majesty's mails!

HOW THE FAVOURITE LOST

CAN I tell you a tale of the sporting sort,
Well, I reckon I know a lot.
Here, boys, bring the whisky and sparklet quick,
I suppose you don't mind it hot?

I'll tell you a tale of the famous race
That a year or two back was run,
Of how it was that the favourite lost,
And how an outsider won.

The Colonel had given a racing cup,
To be run for by all the crowd,
'Twas a catch-weight race, at eleven seven,
And no handicap rot allowed.

Well, everyone there had a horse to run,
But most of the bunch were scratched,
For only four had an earthly chance,
And three of them nearly matched.

There was old Fiddlehead and a cow-hocked roan,
And a sort of a camel-humped grey,
But the pick of the flock was old Dot-and-Go-One,
He was favourite all the way.

LYRA NIGERIÆ

We'd a lovely course when we marked it out,
It would have just made camels weep ;
About two miles long, over twenty jumps,
And through sand about three feet deep.

We'd a splendid day for the races too,
With flies by the million scores,
With a dust-storm on, and the temperature
Was 106 indoors.

The Starter sat on his old white horse,
With a signal flag in his hand,
And the rest of us sat on a red-hot rock
That some humorist called the "stand."

Then came a shout, and a cry "They're off!"
And just as the signal fell,
Well, dammit, the Starter's horse took charge
And came galloping down as well !

The camel-backed grey turned a somersault
At the very first fence of all,
And fell down with a whack on a bed of sand,
And a jolly good place to fall.

HOW THE FAVOURITE LOST

The cow-hocked roan was left lengths behind,
For the pace was beyond his class ;
And old Fiddlehead fell down a disused well,
That was somehow hid in the grass.

But the favourite came sailing along like mad,
Flying fences without a check,
And right alongside him the Starter rode,
And the two going neck for neck.

The Starter was swearing and pulling hard,
While the other man roared and cussed,
Till you couldn't hear from the noise they made,
And you couldn't see 'em for dust.

They came down a straight like a sand-storm cloud,
With never an inch to spare,
Coming head to head, coming stride for stride,
As close as a driven pair.

My word ! but you ought to have heard the shout,
When the winning-post line was crossed,
For the STARTER won by an easy length,
And that's how the favourite lost !

THE HIATUS

THE trader came a-trading
 With his salt and calico,
And he found the country as it was
 Ten thousand years ago;
But he laboured on and sweated,
 And the first foundations laid,
For in the course of time he taught
 The nigger how to trade.

The soldier came a-soldiering,
 And started business then;
He got a thousand apes or so
 And drilled them into men.
He lured them on with pay and kit,
 And eke prospective loot,
And worked until in time he taught
 The nigger how to shoot.

The parson came a-preaching,
 With his Bible and his prayers,
Until he even made a mark
 On minds as blank as theirs.

THE HIATUS

How much they're better off for that
Is more than I can say—
The point is that in time he taught
The nigger how to pray.

The Government came governing,
By ethics of our race,
And they scattered proclamations
Like a blooming paper chase :
But there's one thing that they'll never do—
Or write me down a fool—
Do what they will they'll never teach
A nigger how to rule.

I REMEMBER

I REMEMBER the day that I reached the Coast,
Shall remember it to my grave,
I remember the feeling of hopeless hump
That the sight of Forcados gave.

I remember the vessel that brought me up,
And her scally-wag, black-faced crew,
And can smell the niff of her crowded decks,
And the reek of the palm-oil too.

I remember the feelings with which I learnt
That the largest of stations then,
Consisted of only two zinc-roofed huts
And half a dozen white men.

I remember I tried to play polo then,
Though really with no success,
For I don't suppose anyone played it worse,
Or made a more hopeless mess.

I got in everyone else's way,
And I never once touched the ball,
But my fate was the fate of the brave at least,
For I was the "first to fall."

I REMEMBER

I remember the keenness with which I went,
Intending to shoot big game,
When I shot a Bush cow, and found next day
That the Transport had owned that same.

I remember the various jobs I did,
Not my own, but just overtime,
With about as much knowledge about the work
As a clown in a pantomime.

For the land was new, and all strange to me,
Who was used to the beaten track,
And of course a man's bound to be green at first,
Till the country has burnt him black.

I remember the joy that I felt one day,
When the mangroves went gliding past,
And I felt the dip and the rising roll,
The homeward-bound man at last.

Now I know the country from end to end,
And my memory's all astray,
But still I remember that same first trip
Just as if it were yesterday.

THE COUNTER-IRRITANT

I'd been living alone for a quarter,
And was fairly fed up as well,
Fed up with my job and the country,
And earth—and heaven—and hell.

And I'd just begun to go dotty,
As many poor blokes have done,
Though the graver signs of insanity
Had hardly as yet begun.

But all night long I would lie awake
Only wishing to see the dawn,
All day I went mooning, sulking round,
Only wishing the day was gone.

And then came another fellow,
And I felt that my woes were past,
For it's good after months of solitude
Just to see a white face at last.

I really could hardly greet him,
Nor know whether to cry or laugh,
But I put him a whisky and sparklet,
And we murdered the fatted calf.

THE COUNTER-IRRITANT

And the spell of the Bush seemed lifted,
And a sort of new life began,
I felt I could not do enough for him,
Good Lord ! how I loved that man !

But you've heard of the fire and the fry-pan ?
Well, he proved the saying true,
For I stood him for just a fortnight,
Which was all that a man could do.

He was champion any-weight idiot,
He was pick of the dam-fool flock ;
Talk about taking the biscuit,
He took Huntley & Palmer's stock.

He was public school and Oxford—
At least so he used to say ;
He'd never been out of England,
But been everything in his day.

He'd failed as a lad for Sandhurst,
Had a shot at the medical too,
But "luck was always against him,"
And "no one would help him through."

LYRA NIGERIÆ

He once had a job in the City,
But lost it through "want of means";
He tried to get on to the stage and failed,
He tried writing for magazines.

He was just one eternal grumble,
Just one never-ending grouse,
From morn till night, from week to week,
From the hour that he reached my house.

He'd lug out a faded photo
Of the ugliest kid on earth,
And tell me that she was his youngest girl,
And his favourite child from birth.

Then he'd talk about "lands of banishment,"
And gas about "lonesome years,"
And he'd maunder and drivel and slobber,
And shed alcoholic tears.

But the maddening thing about him,
Was his putting it down to luck,
And not knowing that he was a hopeless Ass,
And *that* was why he had stuck.

THE COUNTER-IRRITANT

He gave me the hump so badly,
Express it no phrases can ;
He fairly got me upon the raw,
Good Lord ! how I loathed that man !

And then came a sudden message,
I'd to go down the road a bit,
And he talked about being "left to his fate,"
And then had a blubbering fit.

He begged me to come back quickly,
"God knows what may happen here !"
Then started off cursing his luck again,
And was fairly shaking with fear.

But I laughed as I rode from the station,
For I think it a better rule,
To go stark dotty through loneliness,
Than be driven mad by a fool.

THE RECHABITES

It is upon a river boat

This truthful story shall begin ;
Not like a ship, she looked more like
A scaffold on a sardine tin.

(I always think a stern-wheel boat
The rummiest-looking thing afloat.)

Upon her deck two young men sat

Who'd never been abroad before,
And as they smoked they did discourse
On curious things they'd heard and saw.

(I think it only natural that
Such men should of their prospects chat.)

Now to avoid confusion, and

This tale to make completer,
I'll say that one was christened James,
The other known as Peter.

(I always fancy simple names,
Like Peter, Thomas, John, or James.)

Said James, "One thing I think is clear,

It will not do too much to drink,
A chronic boozier would not live
In this unwholesome land, I think."

(And James was right, it seems to me,
I advocate sobriety.)

THE RECHABITES

Said Peter, "Yes, but all the same,
I do not think it wise would be,
Having drunk whisky all our lives,
To give it up entirely."

(And Peter, too, I think was wise,
Strict abstinence I don't advise.)

Just then another man came by,
Who had been out ten years or more,
Such men do often give advice
To those who've never been before.
(I think new-comers all do well
To hark to what their seniors tell.)

"Beware," he said, "oh, headstrong youths,
Avoid all spirits, wines, or beer,
No alcohol a man may touch,
Or surely he will perish here."
(I don't say he was right, you note,
But what he said I merely quote.)

Those youths his words accepted straight,
And alcohol they both forswore,
Deeming it wise to take advice
From one who had been there before.
(They had been wiser, I maintain,
The views of other men to gain.)

LYRA NIGERIÆ

It chanced that both of them were sent
To some small station far away,
Where no white strangers ever came,
And "nothing happened" every day.
(Weak memory is my defect,
It's name I cannot recollect.)

James was assistant Resident,
And Peter was the D.S.P.,
And all the year together they
Resided there in harmony.
(I always think that white men should
Live in a common brotherhood.)

James nursed his friend with tender care,
When Peter had a feverish chill,
And Peter sat up half the night
A-nursing James, when he was ill.
(Such friendships always seem to me
To dignify humanity.)

They were teetotal all the year,
The lesson that their mentor taught,
Though they had whisky, wine, and gin,
Which out from England they had brought.
(Some men do bring their liquor out,
And often it is wise, no doubt.)

THE RECHABITES

But there it all unopen lay,
Their mentor's words had made them fear ;
They lime-drinks, milk-and-soda quaffed,
It was a very thirsty year.
(I can't like lime-drinks though I've tried,
Besides, they give me pain inside.)

A twelve-month later as they sat,
And drank their lime-drinks side by side,
Chancing to glance along the road,
A coming hammock they espied.
(A hammock always makes me chill,
It means that some poor bloke is ill.)

A doctor rode in front, and they
Within the swinging hammock saw,
Wrapped up in blankets, sound asleep,
Their mentor of the year before.
(It always makes me very sad
To see a bloke I know "took bad.")

Said Peter to the Doctor man,
"It may seem cheek for me to say,
But since *he's* invalided home,
Teetotalism doesn't pay."
(Now that, I think, was out of place,
You can't judge by a single case.)

LYRA NIGERIÆ

The Doctor scratched his head in thought,
"That may be so or not," said he,
"But in this case it don't apply.
He's invalided with 'D.T.'"
(I always strongly advocate
"D.T." men should be sent home straight.)

James rose and walked into the house,
A cork was drawn with popping sound,
And Peter not a word did say,
He poured his lime-drink on the ground.
(Considering how his faith was tried,
I think that action justified.)

That night the two together sat
And drank their whisky with content,
And argued what their mentor could
By his advice have ever meant.
(They had good reason, you'll agree,
For feeling some perplexity.)

Said James, "What made him talk like that,
Upon the boat, the silly chunk?"
And Peter closed his dexter eye,
And said, "I reckon he was drunk."
(And really now, it seems to me
That was the reason possibly.)

THE MOSQUITO THEORY

THERE'S a theory that we hear about,
Of course we know it's true,
That all the ills we suffer from
Are really only due
To those horrid little insects
That are buzzing night and day,
And the place will be a paradise
When they are cleared away.

There's a good time coming, boys, a good
time coming,
And our hearts with joy are filled ;
There'll be no more fever and no more
scratching
When the mosquito's killed.

When first you reach Lokoja,
Then your trouble's just begun,
First they drown you in a dug-out,
Then they dry you in the sun ;
You're wet with rain, you're mad with thirst,
With heat you're parched and dried,
And the "chop" you sold your shirt to buy
Is scattered far and wide.

LYRA NIGERIÆ

There's a good time coming, boys, a good
time coming,
And our hearts with joy are filled ;
We'll all of us have stations that it's
possible to reach
When the mosquito's killed.

Now it's really rather curious,
But all the same it's right,
That the bungalow one's living in
Is never finished quite ;
Perhaps there are no windows,
Or it isn't painted yet,
Or perhaps they haven't roofed it,
And it's consequently wet.

There's a good time coming, boys, a good
time coming,
And our hearts with joy are filled ;
We'll all of us have houses that are really
quite complete
When the mosquito's killed.

Sometimes official methods
Do seem just a little rough,
Sometimes official statements,
Are perhaps a trifle tough,

THE MOSQUITO THEORY

They fuss and worry like a kid,
Where twopence is concerned,
But if you forward a complaint,
It's "NOTED AND RETURNED."

There's a good time coming, boys, a good
time coming,
And our hearts with joy are filled ;
For a genuine complaint will get a genuine
reply
When the mosquito's killed.

The cotton from Nigeria
The market will support,
And trippers go to Kano
As a blooming health resort ;
There'll be afternoon excursions
To "Burutu-on-the-Sea,"
And Saturday to Monday trips
Among the Benuë.

There's a good time coming, boys, a good
time coming,
And our hearts with joy are filled,
Though it makes us hot to contemplate
where most of us will be
When the mosquito's killed.

THE STORY OF DAVID

ALL ye who to heathen lands do go,
And ye who tarry at home also,
Draw nigh and listen while I relate
Of David Blank and his fearful fate;
And take good heed to this tale I tell,
Or that fearful fate may be yours as well.

.
This David Blank was a trading man,
Of the sort that struggles on how he can,
In a little mud store with a roof of thatch,
In the lonely Bush, on a half-cleared patch;
Up some God-forgotten, uncharted creek,
Where a year seems a month and a day seems a
week;

With a native village or two hard by,
And some fishing huts when the stream was high.
Cheap trash and cotton he traded in,
Palm oil and rubber, salt and gin.
He paid for his baccy, his grub and drink,
But he was not a millionaire, I think.
Now one day when at work in his trading store,
A native woman by chance he saw,

THE STORY OF DAVID

She was tall and graceful, with figure trim,
And something about her attracted him.
Such things will be, I don't say it's right,
But the same God that made us, some black, some
white,
Made us men and women as well, you see.
It's wrong, of course, but such things will be,
When a wealthy suitor starts him to woo,
It's a thousand to one that he pulls it through,
And a white man's store, though it's far from big,
Must seem wealth untold to a naked nig.
He saw, he conquered, she came that day—
Not a passing visit, she came to stay ;
And David's soul did rejoice and sing,
For living alone is a fearful thing.
But his boys did not like it, and that was clear,
They huddled together as those who fear,
And turned as pale as a nigger can,
For she was the wife of the Ju-ju man.
That evening, just as the sun went down,
Up the path that led from the native town,
Came a tall, lean nigger, grotesque and wild,
With his head clean-shaved and his teeth sharp
filed,
Festooned with teeth, beads and cowrie shells,
That rattled and tinkled like little bells.

LYRA NIGERIÆ

'Twas the Ju-ju man ! At the rattling noise
A terror fell on the native boys ;
And he stood before David and thus did say :
" That native woman who came to-day,
Give her back to me, she is mine by right,
And a wife is a wife, be she black or white."
But David's face with fierce rage went red,
" What I have taken is mine," he said.
" Begone, you dog ! What you ask is vain,
And I'll shoot if you dare to come here again."
The Ju-ju man nothing in answer said,
He lowered his eyes and he bowed his head,
Not in word or gesture his rage found vent,
He bowed and he turned and in silence went.
But away in the darkest part of the night,
David woke with a sudden fright ;
For amid the silence he caught the sound
Of someone moving, creeping round.
He caught up his gun as he slid from bed,
And moved to the door with a stealthy tread,
Then up in the darkness there sprang a man,
And swift as a deer through the night he ran.
'Twas the Ju-ju man, by the starlight dim
David saw and remembered him.
He raised his gun, came the sudden flash,
And the shot echoed back like a thunder-crash,

THE STORY OF DAVID

And in answer out of the dark hard by
There arose a terrible, fearful Cry :
Weird, unhuman, a shrieking yell,
A sound not of earth but of utmost hell ;
Full of agony, rage, and fear,
A sound to shudder at, not to hear.
The wild Bush echoed the Cry around,
Till the night seemed filled with the ghastly sound ;
And David's heart seemed to cease to beat,
He staggered a moment to keep his feet.
His brain was swimming, his breath came quick,
And he caught at the wall, feeling deathly sick,
For no sound has been heard since the world began
More dread than the scream of that Ju-ju man.

.
On the night when David first heard that Cry,
The moon was new in the western sky,
Just seen at sunset, horizon low,
Like a little white shred in the after-glow.
But she grew and grew, as the time went past,
Till the nights were as bright as the days at
last ;
And then David out in the moonlight sat,
While the woman crouched on her sleeping-mat,
And the smoke of his baccy went curling high
To the broad round moon in the cloudless sky,

LYRA NIGERIÆ

And there they would listen, beneath her light,
To the myriad voices that filled the night:
The insects' whiz and the croaking frogs,
And the distant howl of the village dogs.
Oh! the peace of those nights with their wondrous
charm,

Like some summer dream in its perfect calm.
Till one night, when the moon was just on the wane,
One night he waited and all in vain,
Till one of his boys, full of fear crept by,
'That woman is sick, and we fear she die.'
In a little round hut where the acrid smoke
Made a man's eyes water and made him choke,
There she lay on the ground with her arms out-
spread,

David stooped beside her and raised her head;
And he knew that the tale of her days was told,
For her hands and her feet had turned icy cold.
With eyes half open and rattling breath,
And the nervous tremors that herald death,
As he touched her hand came the gurgling choke,
And the bond between body and spirit broke.
He started back with a sudden fear,
And knocked over the lamp that was standing near;
It burst with the crash of a bursting shell,
And his boys all uttered a frightened yell,

THE STORY OF DAVID

For mixed with the crash came another sound,
Weird and shrill through the night around ;
He heard it, he knew it, explain who can,
'Twas the wailing scream of the Ju-ju man.

.

When a man's alone in the Bush for long,
His mind and his body alike go wrong ;
Day after day, week after week,
With never a comrade to whom to speak,
With never the sight of a white man's face,
Cut off from the world in that awful place,
And the lonely Bush with its deadly spell,
Ruined David, body and mind as well.
He had weird fancies and restless nights,
With sudden startings and needless frights ;
He had fits of rage, like a naughty child,
When he raved and screamed like a man gone
wild.

Then fever took him and laid him low,
Froze him and burned him from head to toe ;
With every limb on the rack with pain,
And his mind astray from his tortured brain.
When the fever went he was left so weak
He could hardly stand, but could barely speak ;
To crawl from his bed he could scarce contrive,
And his head was buzzing just like a hive ;

LYRA NIGERIÆ

He could not sleep and he could not eat,
And the ground felt woolly beneath his feet.
He crawled with a stick like a man struck lame,
And he used both hands when he signed his name.
His eyes stuck out, and his face fell in,
Till he looked like a skull in a parchment skin;
And as little by little his body shrank,
His mind was becoming a fearful blank.
Then the Devils that live in the Bush came out,
Those Devils that white men know naught about,
Who live and are worshipped by black men still,
And have power, let the Missions do what they will;
And David fell 'neath that demon sway,
Just as men possessed in an earlier day,—
For in earth's dark places strange things are seen,
As they were in the days of the Nazarene,—
And strange wild fancies, all devil-bred,
Came crowding into his poor sick head.
Strange beings seemed all around to steal,
And he thought he was poisoned at every meal.
He was scared to death when he went to bed,
But he feared too much to sit up instead.
Thus mind and body he shrank away,
For the Bush was eating him, day by day.
Now one night when the sun was just going to rest,
Like a blood-red fire was the gleaming west,

THE STORY OF DAVID

While the east was as black as the west was red,
And the sky seemed coming down overhead;
The night closed in, and then silence fell,
A weird, dread hush like some awful Spell,
Till out of the east came an icy breath,
Chilling the heart like the call of death.
The night wind moaned like a thing that grieves,
And the trees grew pale with the turning leaves;
With a muttering roar the tornado came,
And the heavens were lit with a sheet of flame.
In torrents the tropical rain-flood poured,
The lightning flashed and the thunder roared;
It rent the sky, it racked the ground,
And Hell and Chaos went raging round.
By the gleam of the lightning the scene was plain,
The plunging trees and the thrashing rain.
Between the flashes, so dark the night
That the nearest object was hid from sight.
The boys crouched in the verandah wide,
And David cowered all alone inside.
They heard him cry and they heard him moan,
Like a frightened child in the dark alone;
Cursing, praying, stark mad with fear,
An awful, horrible thing to hear.
Till suddenly out of the house he ran,
With his weakness gone, like a fiend-held man;

LYRA NIGERIÆ

As he rushed beside them they heard him yell,
"Run for it! Run for it! Run like hell!"
Down to the side of the creek he flew,
And launched a little one-man canoe;
Out in the midst of that swirling stream,
At each quick dart of the lightning's gleam,
His tall white figure was plain to view,
Standing bolt upright in that mad canoe.
Caught in the swirl of the stream, wind lashed,
While above the tornado roared and crashed;
He raised his hands and he seemed to shout,
But God alone knows what he raved about,
For his voice was lost in that deafening roar,
And never a word of it reached the shore.
Then suddenly out of the raging night,
Came one lightning flash so intensely bright
That the world was lost to the blinded sight,
In one blink of quivering, living light;
The thunder came with the lightning flash,
One thundering, stunning, almighty crash!
The solid earth seemed to reel and rock
And quiver, as though with an earthquake shock.
It died in a muttering, rumbling roar,
And mixed with the sound there was something more.
His boys all heard it, in wild affright
They sprang to their feet, scattered left and right,

THE STORY OF DAVID

And hither and thither in terror ran—
'Twas the wailing scream of the Ju-ju man.

.
They found him after a day or so,
Where he'd drifted ashore a few miles below ;
Whether struck by lightning or simply drowned,
Or scared to death by that ghastly sound,
Or chilled by the storm, it is hard to say,
But the life was all out of him anyway.
There in the scum of the river rank,
He lay face down on the slimy bank ;
His boys all feared him, so there he lay
In that foetid swamp for many a day ;
Unwatched, uncared for, a ghastly Thing,
Like some hideous doll with a broken string ;
'Mid a circle of vultures with greedy eyes,
And a horrible halo of buzzing flies,
In the slush and the ooze of the river's brim,
Till they fetched up a white man to bury him.

.
Now if up the Undobi Creek you go,—
I don't know why you should, but you may do so,—
Where the launches come close underneath the shore,
There are still the remains of a ruined store ;
And standing up 'mid the bushes green,
A whitewashed cross there may still be seen,

LYRA NIGERIÆ

Grotesque yet solemn it looks somehow,
It was upright once, though it's crooked now.
Now when you see it, just meditate
Upon David Blank and his fearful fate,
And take his lesson to be your own—
It's as well to let other men's wives alone.
Be they white or coloured, it's just the same,
It's a white man's business to play the game.
And other men's wives are debarred from you,
Unless you're a fool and a blackguard too,
And would find yourself 'neath a blacker ban
Than even the curse of this Ju-ju man.

JOHN THEOPHILUS JONES

WHEN some men go out to the Coast, they have an idea that their black brother was only meant to be licked :

And that because he squats on his hunkers instead of sitting like we do, he's only meant to be kicked.

This idea is fallacious, and he'll give it up sooner or later supposing he means to stay.

Though mollycoddling the natives is a mistake, and whether Dr G.'s soft soap for black people is a success I am unable to say.

John Theophilus Jones came out with the idea that he was the biggest thing that ever happened, and boss of the show :

That niggers were made to wait upon him ; what other white men were for I don't know.

I travelled up river with him and never heard anything like the scream and the shout of him : And if any nigger asked him anything, a string of words unprintable was all they could ever get out of him.

LYRA NIGERIÆ

I knew there'd be trouble before the end of his tour,
and I told him so too;
But he knew more about it than I did, though he'd
never seen a nigger outside of the Zoo.
At headquarters they couldn't stand him, for he
bullied the natives and cheeked his betters;
Till they up and told him they hadn't got room there
for such a monumental man of four letters.¹

They all had one opinion about him, and with Coast
frankness told it him straight to his face.
And then made him a District Superintendent of the
Police, away in some unpronounceable place.
There he had a gaol and a police barracks about
which he could worry and fuss,
The gaol was as big as a pig-sty and the barracks
about the size of a twopenny bus.

He fussed about writing reports about his "depart-
ment" and other people's as well,
Till the other people found out about it, and re-
quested him to mind his own business and go
to Hell!

¹ Four letters would describe him well, an F an O an O an L.—
SHAKESPEARE.

JOHN THEOPHILUS JONES

But he would not even do that, he worked with
much energy, that there was no doubt of,
Till he'd have worried those police and those prisoners
right out of their wits, if they'd any wits to go
out of.

And he went on buzzing about day and night, like
a bug on the end of a pin,

Till one midnight there was a shower of rain and the
back wall of the gaol fell in.

The police had a consultation, and one grey-haired
philosopher said,

"When them fool man sees this, he go talk we all dead.
Besides he no catch any savvy, he go beat we and
kick we for sure,

So I just go back to my own country, for I no fit to
stay any more."

One prisoner remarked bitterly, it was hardly worth
while being in prison with such a damn fool as
the boss of it,

And if they all gave up the job and retired, they
wouldn't feel the loss of it.

So to end up with they agreed *nem. con.*, and all
walked away in a mob.

They have not come back yet, perhaps they will, but
they won't find Theophilus; he's out of a job.

THE MAN WHO WAS

I HAVE got my pension, and left the Coast,
And men talk of my blooming luck,
In being able to live at home
And giving the Coast the chuck.

Well, I ought to be thankful and bless my stars,
And I am so in the main,
But one seems to think of the Coast sometimes,
And half wish one was back again.

When I sit down to a decent meal,
I can see that I'm lucky then,
When I think of "mince-ball" and "bully beef,"
And some tough old leather hen.

When I go to rest in an open bed,
Then I know that I'm lucky too;
Not cooped up in a frowsy mosquito net,
With pyjamas all sweated through.

In summer time, when the soft clean breeze
Is rich with the scent of flowers,
And I think of the stinks—oh, of course it's right!
I am lucky, by all the powers.

THE MAN WHO WAS

But the voice of the Coast keeps calling me,
And a man can't help but hear ;
For you're bound to strike root in any place
If you stick there year after year.

I hear it call when November fogs
Are freezing me through and through,
And I think of those sweltering, burning days,
And the sky of eternal blue.

And the rates and taxes, and all that rot,
And the fat-headed English law,
Not fit for men who can hold their own,
Just for school-kids and nothing more.

And I hear it call when I meet old pals ;
My God ! but it calls aloud,
When I think of the glorious times I've had
With that same old jovial crowd.

But I hear it most when their fun runs high,
And the price is beyond my call ;
For it does seem hard, after all these years,
To be out of it after all.

Yes, it seems ungrateful, but all the same,
It comes something like a pain,
When I think of that stinking, sweltering Coast,
And—well, wish I was back again !

“THE NIGERIAN’S LOT”

WHEN a lively young mosquito isn’t biting,
And sandflies are not gnawing at your toes,
Then it’s certain that your horses start a-fighting,
And your boy starts playing hookey with your
clothes.

And your feelings you with difficulty smother,
When you see the latest thing the blighter’s done ;
Taking one consideration with another,
A Nigerian’s lot’s an uninviting one.

If your boy should ever fail to knot your laces,
And the washerman omit to starch your socks,
Then it’s certain that your kit has gone to blazes,
And white ants simply swarm in every box.
And your feelings you with difficulty smother,
When you try each box and find it overrun ;
Taking one consideration with another,
A Nigerian’s lot’s a most expensive one.

If your boy should realise a fire is risky,
And should fail to clean your gun with Worcester
sauce,

“THE NIGERIAN’S LOT”

That’s the time when you get kerosine for whisky,
And they’ll fry your bully beef in soap, of course.
And your feelings you with difficulty smother,
When the blighter grins at you and thinks it fun
Taking one consideration with another,
A Nigerian’s life’s a simply maddening one.

If the mail should ever come the day it oughter,
And they haven’t lost your letters down below,
Then you’re absolutely bound to get a snorter,
About something that occurred ten years ago.
And your feelings you with difficulty smother,
As you hunt up Proclamation X.B. 1;
Taking one consideration with another,
A Nigerian’s lot’s a rather funny one.

If the sand-storm shouldn’t fill your mouth with
cinders,
And the sun should fail to lay you out for dead,
A tornado comes and blows your house to flinders,
And you’ll find a lively scorpion in your bed.
And your feelings you with difficulty smother,
What with worry, fever, dysentery and sun;
But with your sparklet and your whisky,
And your “Sanu” when you’re frisky,
A Nigerian’s life’s a tolerable one.

THE TOAST OF THE EVENING

Proposing the toast of the evening, which was, "There's no land in the world like Northern Nigeria, let us drink its health," the actual toast delivered was as follows:—

THERE is no land in all the world

Like Northern Nigeria—*d—— that fly!*

Excuse interruptions.—There is no land—

Here, the horses are fighting—maidoki! kai!

I repeat, that there is no land on earth—

Oh! boys, stop that yapping, for God's own sake!

There is no land, as I said before—

Here, boy, bring a machette and kill that snake.

I won't be beaten—there is no land—

Excuse me scratching—sandflies or fleas—

I repeat that there is no land on earth—

Just put your foot on that scorpion, please!

There is no land—*What a fearful smell!*

From what possible source can such perfume rise!

There is no land—*Oh! I give it best—*

Boy, bring me a fan, drive away these flies.

THE TOAST OF THE EVENING

Oh! Holy Thunder! There is no land
In Britannia's realm from West to East—
Whose infernal pie-dog is that outside?—
Well, take my gun, go and shoot the beast.

There is no land—*Here, boy, fill my glass,*
By this time you tumble to the toast I mean—
THERE IS NO LAND! Well, let's drink its health!
Oh, boy! Oh! d—— it, that's kerosene!

A DAN SANDA

ONE morning 'twas just about daybreak,
And the liquor had flowed overnight,
I was drinking a bucket of water,
When I saw a most horrible sight.
And I said, "Holy Allah! what is it?
Lor' lumme, I must have been tight."

'Twas a nigger dressed up in the fashion
Of an organ-man's monkey gone mad,
A little round jacket of yellow
Was the pick of the garments he had.
And I said, "Wilfrid Lawson for ever,
Pink rats was not nearly as bad."

So I called to him, "Beautiful vision,
Are you spirit, or mortal like me?
Are you born of 'Four Crowns' and 'Perfection'?
Of some lunatic out on the spree?"
And he said, "No, I be a policeman,
A Dan Sanda P.C., N.N.P."

A DAN SANDA

"Sometimes we be fit to dig ditches,
Or carry a load to and fro ;
When a white man sends 'book' or a message,
Then he tells a policeman to go ;
So perhaps I be some sort of postman,
I no savvy if it be so.

"They arm we with pieces of rifle,
Though really we no savvy fight,
And we officers all be called 'Major,'
And they drill we from morning till night ;
So perhaps I be some sort of soldier,
Though really I no savvy quite.

"When a prisoner go out we go with him,
To see he no steal any loot ;
We carry a gun or a rifle
When a white man be fit to go shoot.
Now I no savvy stay any longer,
I got to go clean massa's boot."

So I said to him, "Sheep in wolf's clothing,
You lion with jackass's bray,
You crow in the guise of a peacock,
Avaunt you ! Begone ! Get away !
Go back to your many employments,
I'm too bilious to stand you to-day."

A MAN FROM THE BUSH

LEAN, bearded, shockheaded and tanned,
And clad in some rags of khaki,
Who talked to himself as he walked,
Came a stranger to interview me—
'Twas a man from the Bush.

And I said, "Mr Man from the Bush,
Going home to old England in glory,
That your medical sheets I may fill,
Come, sit down and tell me your story,
Mr Man from the Bush."

And he said, "Well, that seems a rum start;
But if you say it's right I don't doubt it;
I will tell you as much as I can,
Though straight, I don't know much about it,
I'm a man from the Bush ;

"And you seem to lose count of it all—
Oh ! it's God's holy truth, I'm not lying ;
When a man's all alone by himself,
He don't know if he's well, ill, or dying,
Out alone in the Bush.

A MAN FROM THE BUSH

“ When there’s two men, or three, that’s all right ;
But that living alone, it’s a terror,
For you think and you fancy and dream,
Till you’re fairly sewed up, and no error,
Out alone in the Bush.

“ For there’s places up there that’s so still
That the tiniest sound seems a riot ;
Where the silence fair sets you ashake,
For the bed of your grave ain’t more quiet
Than some parts of the Bush.

“ Well, of course I’ve had fever sometimes,
What my temperature was I’ve no notion ;
And I once had a touch of the jumps,
But that was through pushing the lotion,
Like a man in the Bush.

“ For when a man’s living alone,
And has liquor, he’s certain to mop it,
Not through choice, but just simply through hump,
God Almighty Himself couldn’t stop it,
Out alone in the Bush.

“ And I once had a touch of the sun—
Lor ! the heat’s such that no one could stick it ;
And a woman I married up there—
Well, least said soonest mended ’s the ticket
With a girl from the Bush.

LYRA NIGERIÆ

“ But when a man’s all by himself,
Half afraid of his brains going cracky,
Can you blame if he tries to make friends—
Though it’s only a bit of a blackie,
Just a girl from the Bush ?

“ For I’ve shied at the fall of a leaf,
And the cry of a bird set me shaking,
I’ve woke up in the still of the night,
And I’ve laid there just sweating and quaking
In the hush of the Bush.

“ I’ve seemed to hear voices sometimes,
Maybe only the wind if you knew it,
But I’ve hid my revolver away,
Fair frightened for fear that I’d—do it,
Through fear of the Bush.

“ Well, that’s about all I’ve to tell,
Maybe I’ve told more than I oughter ;
No, never had dysentery yet,
Nor liver, nor boils, nor blackwater,
Over there in the Bush.

“ That all, sir ? Well, thank you, good-day !
Felt just like a school-kid confessing.
If I’m ill all the time I’m at home,
I won’t be *alone*, that’s a blessing
To a man from the Bush.”

ON TREK

I AM trekking along an endless road,
With the sweat running through my shirt,
And I'm fairly fed up with the blooming job,
And the heat and the dust and the dirt.

They gave me that scarecrow there to ride,
Not fit for a tinker's hack,
And I sat on the brute as it crawled along
Till it jolly near broke my back.

I whacked the brute, I spurred the brute,
Till I thought I'd have broken a bone,
Just to keep him ahead of a blooming nig,
That was carrying full five stone!

I cursed the brute, I damned the brute,
I wished that the brute was dead,
Till fairly for fear that I'd go insane
I got off and *walked* instead.

With the white hot sky above my head,
And the burnt-up land below,
Like a badly-kept orchard all overgrown,
And without any fruit on show.

LYRA NIGERIÆ

Just a spire-shaped anthill here and there,
And the rest all dust, dust, dust,
And the endless road going on, on, on,
Till I thought that my soul 'd bust.

Not a house, not a man, not a beast, not a bird,
Not even a butterfly,
Till I'd fairly have given a full day's pay
To see Nick himself come by.

Oh! I'm trekking along an endless road,
With the sweat running through my shirt,
And I'm fairly fed up with the blooming job,
And the heat and the dust and the dirt.

LAST POST

THE sun slides down through the evening mist,
Golden, then ruby, then amethyst ;
The hush of the evening falls afar,
And light springs quickly from star to star.
Round the rough-made table a jovial crowd
Are gathered with jest and laughter loud,
And then through the night, like a wailing ghost,
Comes the bugle call, "Last Post! Last Post!"

My God ! each note of that bugle cry
Goes echoing back through the years gone by ;
In solemn state we have heard that played
O'er some well-loved friend on his "Last Parade,"
While friends and comrades stood silent all,
The wailing throb of the March in *Saul* ;
And they rise on that call like a mighty host,
Old friends I have known, "Last Post! Last Post!"

We have heard it played on the shoreless tide,
When the shotted hammock has left the side,

LYRA NIGERLÆ

When we have given our best to the endless wave,
With never a mark to his wandering grave.
In the lonely Bush, at the world's back end,
O'er the rough-tied blanket that held a friend,
With a single comrade, or two at most,
To mourn his going, "Last Post! Last Post!"

And to me it wails for the time that is past,
As it will when I know no time at the last,
For the friends I have loved, for the girls I have
kissed,
For the years I have squandered, the chances missed
For the foolish word, for the action mean,
For the ashes of what I might have been,
Oh! bury them, each reproving ghost,
Fill in the grave! "Last Post! Last Post!"





